

A Diagnostic Toolkit in the Work with Children and Adolescents Showing Signs Of Sociopathic Personality Disorder

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Abstract

The article considers the issues of using a diagnostic toolkit in the process of work with children and adolescents showing signs of sociopathic personality disorder. The authors analyze primary and secondary symptoms of sociopathic personality disorder among children and adolescents. Negative manifestations of psyche in case of sociopathic personality disorder are discovered. The author's approach to diagnosing children and adolescents showing signs of sociopathic personality disorder is suggested.

Keywords: children with disabilities, mental disorders, sociopath, sociopathic personality disorder symptoms, etiology of sociopathic personality disorder, diagnostic toolkit, inclusive education.

INTRODUCTION

The life of modern children and adolescents becomes more intense, more complex and more dynamic every year. It requires a lot of inner resources and strength from the younger generation that involves knowing everything, doing everything in time, showing personal activity and subject position in different spheres of life. At the same time specialists in the field of psychiatry and psychology around the world are alarmed by the fact that nowadays mental disorders are becoming more and more frequent among children and adolescents.

In the message of the chief psychiatrist of the Ministry of Health of the Russian Federation, the director of the Federal Medical Research Center of Psychiatry and Narcology Z. Kekelidze it is noted that "presently, 60% of the total number of children having mental disorders and developmental anomalies are the preschoolers. 70-80% of schoolchildren show signs of disorders and developmental anomalies. "Moreover, according to Z. Kekelidze, "school disadaptation" is noted among 40% of primary schoolchildren that implies a violation of the adaptation of the child to school conditions in which there is a decrease in the ability to be taught [1].

Roman Suleimanov, Associate Professor at the Department of Psychiatry and Medical Psychology of Peoples Friendship University of Russia, notes in an interview that "the number of mental disorders of children have been increasing for last 20 years if not longer. In fact it is extremely hard for children to adapt to school. School disadaptation leads to further professional disadaptation that is children cannot adapt to life in society. ...Now it is time of psychopaths and sociopaths... In any normal society there is always a certain number of such pathologic persons but now in our society, in our culture a number of psychopaths has increased so dramatically that they begin to dictate their own rules of the game" [2].

According to recent statistics, 15% of people, who are being treated in psychiatric units including children and adolescents as well, show signs of antisocial personality disorder [1].

At the same time educational community notes that it became more difficult to work with modern children, to teach and educate them. A lot of them demonstrate a desire to blame others, to revenge, to get offended; they show different kinds of aggression, the lack of cooperation with the surrounding people,

violation of social behavior norms, as well as the tendency to be social outsiders and autistic manifestations, etc. Workers in education (teachers, class teachers, social educators and psychologists) have difficulty in choosing ways, means and methods of working with children who have such difficulties.

Thus, at present time there is a need for analyzing, understanding the problem, finding interventional, preventive measures of educational impact and rendering assistance at the stages of the growing up of the younger generation and their social environment.

The aim of the article: to analyze the peculiarities of children and adolescents showing signs of sociopathic disorder and to develop a diagnostic toolkit to work with such groups by means of inclusive education as well.

MAIN PART

What is sociopathic personality disorder?

According to medical classifications, sociopathic personality disorder is antisocial personality disorder that manifests itself in apparent violation of social norms and traditions, excessive impulsiveness leading to blatant aggression and the lack of ability to form human ties.

Among outdated terms there are: emotionally unstable personality disorder, antisocial psychopathy, heboides psychopathy, psychopathy.

According to the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (ICD-10), sociopathic personality disorder is characterized by three or more criteria of personality disorder:

- callous unconcern for the feelings of others;
- a strong position of irresponsibility and neglect of social rules and responsibilities;
- inability to maintain relationships in the absence of difficulties in their formation;
- a low tolerance to frustration and a low threshold for discharge of aggression, including violence;
- inability to experience the feeling of guilt; behaviour is not readily modifiable by adverse experience, including punishment; a tendency to blame others or put forward plausible rationalizations for their behavior bringing the patient into conflict with society.

It is worth noting that many authors such as P.B. Gannushkin, A.E. Lichko, N. McWilliams, Robert D. Hare [3, 4, 5, 6] and others share the opinion that sociopathic personality disorder includes: sociopathic disorder, immoral personality [7], asocial personality, antisocial disorder, antisocial personality, psychopathic personality disorder. The consequences of such disorders make a person disadaptive, unrealized, aggressive, deviant, etc. such a person become dangerous for society sooner or later.

Scientists agree that sociopathy is not a psychic disease but a personality disorder. The characteristic features of sociopathic personality disorder are neglect of social rules and regulations, the lack of ability and desire to build relationships with other people. At the same time persons with dissocial disorder (sociopathy) have no problems with establishing new contacts. Sociopaths can be very charming and can show vivid interest in other people's affairs but they are not capable of taking other people's feelings into account; they do not show empathy and cannot bear even minimal responsibility for what happens.

Knowing and understanding the main symptoms of sociopathic personality disorder among children and adolescents is very important for the work of teachers, medics and psychologists. The problems of describing symptom complexes of sociopathic personality disorder were considered in the works of E. Berne, A.S. Zintsova, M.N. Galstyan, P.B. Gannushkin, E.O. Smoleva, Robert D. Hare and others [3, 6, 8, 9]. It was discovered that the main symptoms of sociopathic personality disorder among children and adolescents are as follows.

- **Inadequate actions**, ignoring social norms. Inability to consider consequences.
- **Mendacity**.
- **Criminal behavior**. To escape a difficult situation a sociopath boldly dares to violate the law.
- **The lack of conscience**, shame, guilt for the done deeds.
- **Manipulative behavior** consisting in the desire to be a leader without doing anything.
- **Indifference**, inability to perceive other people's needs on the background of the lack of attachment.
- **High self-esteem**, the need for praise, admiration, attention from others.
- **Unjustified risk** based on the desire for thrill.
- **Aggressive reaction** at the slightest feeling of discomfort; laws and moral principles cause irritation.
- **Intimidation** as a form of constant demonstration of moral and physical superiority over people and animals.
- **Failure to learn from mistakes**, inability to draw conclusions, and to change behavior
- **Inability to communicate with others**, low communication skills.

Secondary symptoms and indicators: rudeness towards others, aptitude for theft, detainment, convictions (several), imprisonment experience (relapse), adolescent criminal record, juvenile affairs commission and other school commissions attendance, mendacity and manipulation attempts, difficulties in following daily routine, absent-mindedness, untidiness, negligence in clothes, high impulsiveness. Sociopaths do not expect to some actions from themselves, they are prone to alcoholism, drug addiction; however, these are not attempts to get away from their problems but to indulge their desires. They often become organizers and leaders of destructive organizations since the only safe form of existence for them is universal submission.

What are the causes of sociopathy in childhood and adolescence?

The answer to this question lies at the intersection of psychology, psychiatry and pedagogy. There is no clear

understanding of the causes of the phenomenon of sociopathy among scientists so far. In the etiopathogenetic relation it is customary to distinguish three groups that determine the appearance of psychopathy and sociopathy [10]:

1. **Constitutional disorders** caused by genetic factors. Qualities are often transferred from mother to son, from father to daughter. Although specific inheritance mechanisms are not discovered. This type of disorders can be observed in early childhood through the appearance of pathologic characteristic features.
2. **Organic dysfunctions** are the result of pathologic personality formation caused by early cerebral-organic insufficiency that is connected with intranatal, perinatal, postnatal neuroinfections, neurointoxication and craniocerebral injuries.
3. **Socialized disorders**. Their basis includes long-term, unfavourable microsocial influences at the stage of adolescence: family and family up-bringing; influence of reference groups; social realization and employment; specifics of social interaction in educational institutions, etc. All that can lead to psychological trauma of a person.

In case of sociopathy socialized disorders play the dominant role. Apart from first two types it is distinguished by slow formation, less depth and persistence of manifestation leading to character deformation, dissocial personality disorder, i.e. sociopathy (F60.2).

Among consequences of negative influence in forming sociopathic disorders the following psychological phenomena are singled out:

- Psychic deprivation (H. Harlow, K. Horney).
- Discrepancy of attachments (J. Bowlby, R. Spitz, A. Freud and others).
- Disorders and retardations of emotional-volitional sphere (G.E. Sukhareva, M.S. Pevzner, T.A. Vlasova and others).
- Social-psychological immaturity (G.E. Sukhareva, M.S. Pevzner, V.V. Kovalev, K.S. Lebedinskaya and others).
- Partial psychic infantilism (M.S. Pevzner, V.V. Kovalev).
- Immaturity of psychomotor system ("motor infantilism") (M.O. Gurevich, M.S. Pevzner).
- Borderline intellectual insufficiency (V.V. Kovalev and others) [11].

We believe that adolescents showing signs of sociopathic disorder are included in the risk group for health reasons since many of them have development and health defects. They require special attention on the part of specialists as they potentially represent a pronounced or latent risk group for behavior, health, educational activities, etc [12].

It is vital to timely detect this phenomenon and to provide practical assistance to the child and his social environment to enable adequate growing-up, social developing and health preserving. Thus, the question arises: what should a diagnostic toolkit be like?

Long-term experience of working with these groups of children allowed to distinguish the stages and aspects of the specialist's activity, the diagnostic tools used, which is presented in Table 1.

CONCLUSION

The timely diagnostics enables the school psychologists to start preventive, educational, correctional and consultative activity among children and adolescents showing signs of sociopathic disorder at early stages. Such activity should be carried out among all the participants of educational environment and primarily among children themselves to provide assistance, support and to contribute to normal growth, development and health preservation.

Table 1. The content of work and diagnostic toolkit of studying children and adolescents showing signs of sociopathic disorder

Stage	Aspects of psychologist's activity	Toolkit
Primary diagnostics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quantitative and qualitative psychological diagnostics of problems of school age connected with identifying children and adolescents with explicit sociopathy and potential sociopaths in elementary and secondary school. • Expanding the database of children showing signs of sociopathic disorder. • Identifying disadvantaged families having children who show signs of sociopathic disorder. 	<p>[1] Talks with class teachers about disadvantaged families and children showing signs of sociopathic disorder. The indicators of children and adolescents are as follows.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>External manifestations</i> of inadequate actions; manipulating other people's behavior; deviant behaviour of different types; unjustified risk; aggressive reactions; intimidating others; aptitude for theft; detainment; registered at juvenile affairs commission, school commission, medical commission; cannot follow daily routine, behavior and activity norms; alcohol and drug use, etc. • <i>Inner qualities</i>: mendacity, lack of conscience, high self-esteem, inability to communicate with others, weak attachment to relatives and friends, infantilism, etc. <p>[2] Family diagnostics and analysis of family up-bringing peculiarities. It is carried out with the use of the following indicators: family composition, family characteristics, typical family condition, family traditions, family values, family up-bringing style, peculiarities of family up-bringing, parent's attitude towards school, difficulties that parents experience in the process of up-bringing a child.</p> <p>[3] Primary diagnostics of children and adolescents to discover bad habits, peculiarities of communication with others, attachments to family and relations with parents, peculiarities of behavior (conducted in the form of questionnaires, talks and interviews).</p>
In-depth diagnostics	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Developing and maintaining database of children of risk groups for sociopathy. 2. In-depth diagnostics of children and adolescents showing signs sociopathic disorder. 3. Developing and maintaining database of disadvantaged families having children who show signs of sociopathic disorder. 	<p>Diagnostic toolkit for children and adolescents</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <u>Projective techniques</u>: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Method of the kinetic family drawing (KFD) • "Unreal animal" methodology • Self-portrait test • Lüscher colour test • "My holidays" test • The tree-drawing test • Thematic apperception test (TAT) (H. Murrey) 2. <u>The study of individual psychological personality features</u>: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eysenk personality questionnaire • Leonhard-Schmieschek questionnaire • Pathology diagnostics questionnaire (A.E. Lichko) • Method of studying the level of subjective control (E.F. Bazhin, A.M. Atkind) • EPI questionnaire • The Levenson self-report psychopathy scale, a test of sociopathy • Psychopathy checklist (R. Hare) • Psychodiagnostic test (V. Melnikov, L. Yampolsky) 3. <u>The study of behavior peculiarities</u>: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aptitude for deviant behavior questionnaire (ADB) • Sociopath test • The interpersonal diagnosis personality (T. Leary) [4] <u>Diagnostics of a family and family up-bringing</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • G. Horn questionnaire • Child's Report of Parental Behavior Inventory (CRPBI, Russian adaptation) • AFR questionnaire (Analysis of family relationships) • Parental Attitude Research Instrument (PARI) • Strategies of family up-bringing test (test for parents) • The scale of a child's attachment to family members (A.I. Barkan)

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors confirm that the data do not contain any conflict of interest.

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